

# Chapter 12

## Local E–Government and Citizen Participation: Case Studies from Australia and Italy

**Julie Freeman**  
*University of Canberra, Australia*

### ABSTRACT

*This chapter explores local e-government and the provision of online spaces for citizen participation. It highlights how different approaches to e-government development and implementation contribute to the likely success of participatory practices in informing decision-making and enhancing civic engagement with government. A comparative examination is drawn from the experiences of two local governments – the City of Casey in Australia and the Italian City of Bologna. The City of Casey’s e-government prioritises service delivery, with opportunities for participation largely restricted. In contrast, the City of Bologna facilitates two-way online citizen discourse and deliberation, which is used to enhance public policy. This chapter highlights that institutional contexts, including insufficient policies and the understandings and motives of political actors, affect the development of participatory e-government and the use of citizen contributions in decision-making. It suggests that successfully facilitating civic participation and engagement through e-government requires strong policy frameworks guiding online content and applications, and a broader change in governmental culture so that representatives are receptive to civic views.*

### INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world, governments are developing their use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for e-government practices. New technologies, particularly the Internet, can

aid information dissemination, enhance service delivery, and enable greater transparency and accountability of government operations. The success of e-government ventures will vary depending on the specific aims of individual initiatives, the government body and its citizenry, and the sup-

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-4173-0.ch012

porting frameworks in place. This chapter focuses on the capacity of local e-government to foster, stimulate and support citizen participation online.

Local e-government initiatives often lag behind applications implemented by state and federal authorities due to resource limitations or a lack of recognition of the potential value of advanced online practices (Seifert, 2006; Cohen, van Geenhuizen, & Nijkamp, 2005). Local governments frequently prioritise one-way online practices and increased service delivery functions, which offer the greatest economic rewards for councils (see Beynon-Davies & Martin, 2004). Many councils are, however, now recognising the need to advance their online initiatives to take advantage of two-way possibilities for exchange, sharing and collaboration. This chapter highlights how different approaches to e-government development impact upon citizen participation practices. It suggests that, to be effective, online participation must inform decision-making processes, as it is this that facilitates greater engagement with government.

This chapter details the experiences of two local governments – the City of Casey (Casey) in Australia and the Italian City of Bologna (Bologna) – and the way each has developed online practices. Casey and Bologna were selected because each has taken a different approach to e-government with substantial variations in the intended use of online communications, but both began their online development at a similar time. Casey's e-government has followed a linear transition, initially using a website for greater transparency of government information, then progressing to enable limited interactivity and improved service delivery. While the council is beginning to recognise the need to include opportunities for dialogue and exchange with citizens through e-government, current forms of two-way online involvement appear largely tokenistic and do not yet facilitate citizen participation in decision-making processes. In contrast, Bologna began its e-government development with

a strong focus on local democracy and the need for citizen contributions to inform public policy. While the government faced many challenges to its online development, it continues to provide and continually updates spaces for civic inclusion, and offers a sound example of how to effectively facilitate civic engagement through e-government. This chapter suggests that, to successfully develop its e-government practices to facilitate increased citizen participation and engagement as Bologna has done, Casey will require both stronger policy frameworks guiding the development of its online content and applications, and a change in its governmental culture to be more receptive and responsive to civic input. First, however, this chapter offers a discussion of the importance of local e-government specifically, and provides a distinction between the concepts of ICT-enabled interaction, participation and engagement.

## **BACKGROUND**

While there are numerous understandings and definitions of electronic government, it is broadly understood as the use of networked ICTs such as the Internet and mobile telephony in government operations (see Mayer-Schönberger & Lazer, 2007; Moon, 2002). Early perspectives on e-government often focused on the potential of new technologies to facilitate information dissemination and improved service delivery, viewing citizens as clients or customers (see, for example, Silcock, 2001; Ho, 2002; Kunstelj & Vintar, 2004). More recently, there has been a shift away from the bureaucratic focus of e-government initiatives towards more citizen-centric applications (Norris, 2005; Homburg, 2008; Luna-Reyes, Gil-Garcia, & Celorio Mansi, 2011). Emphasis has been placed on the capacity of e-government to facilitate two-way communication between citizens and governments (Norris, 2005). Such functions have

22 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:  
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/local-government-citizen-participation/76642](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/local-government-citizen-participation/76642)

## Related Content

---

### Community Practices to Improve E-Governance at the Grass Roots

Hakikur Rahman (2011). *Cases on Adoption, Diffusion and Evaluation of Global E-Governance Systems: Impact at the Grass Roots* (pp. 1-34).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/community-practices-improve-governance-grass/46466](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/community-practices-improve-governance-grass/46466)

### Smart Cities as Open Governance Laboratories: Multidisciplinary Approach From Engineering

Mario Oscar Ordaz Oliver, Evelin Gutiérrez, Jesús Patricio Ordaz, Javier Hernández Pérez, Amadeo Manuel Hernández Hernández and Justo Fabián Montiel Hernández (2026). *Innovation, Transparency, and Participation in Smart Government* (pp. 225-248).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/smart-cities-as-open-governance-laboratories/395198](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/smart-cities-as-open-governance-laboratories/395198)

### The Role of Social Media in the Public Sector: Opportunities and Challenges

Anteneh Ayanso and Darryl Moyers (2012). *Citizen 2.0: Public and Governmental Interaction through Web 2.0 Technologies* (pp. 1-22).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/role-social-media-public-sector/63786](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/role-social-media-public-sector/63786)

### Infusing Innovation in the Policy Analysis and Evaluation Phases of the Policy Cycle: The Policy Compass Approach

Ourania Markaki, Panagiotis Kokkinakos, Sotirios Koussouris, John Psarras, Habin Lee, Martin Löhe and Yuri Glikman (2014). *International Journal of Electronic Government Research* (pp. 19-36).

[www.irma-international.org/article/infusing-innovation-in-the-policy-analysis-and-evaluation-phases-of-the-policy-cycle/120257](http://www.irma-international.org/article/infusing-innovation-in-the-policy-analysis-and-evaluation-phases-of-the-policy-cycle/120257)

### City Managers and E-Government Development: Assessing Technology Literacy and Leadership Needs

Greg Streib and Ignacio Navarro (2008). *International Journal of Electronic Government Research* (pp. 37-53).

[www.irma-international.org/article/city-managers-government-development/2060](http://www.irma-international.org/article/city-managers-government-development/2060)